



Incoming House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., accompanied by incoming House Minority Whip Rep. Katherine Clark, D-Mass., Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., other members of Congress and family of fallen officers, speaks during a ceremony marking the second year anniversary of the violent insurrection by supporters of then-President Donald Trump, in Washington, Friday, Jan. 6, 2023.

Associated Press

2 years after Jan. 6, speaker scrap freezes Congress again

By ZEKE MILLER, MARY CLARE JALONICK and CALVIN WOODWARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Such are the fractures in the country, between the political parties and inside the Republican Party itself, that one time-honored specialty of Washington — memorializing and coming together over national trauma — isn't what it used to be.

Friday morning's moment of silence at the Capitol to contemplate the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on it drew mostly Democrats, with brief remarks from Democratic leaders new and incoming — Reps. Nancy Pelosi and Hakeem Jeffries — and none from the GOP.

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2 years after Jan. 6, speaker scrap freezes Congress again

Continued from Front

The event was focused on the Capitol Police officers who protected the building that day, and families of law enforcement officers who died after the riot. Jeffries said 140 officers were seriously injured that day and “many more will forever be scarred by the blood-thirsty violence of the insurrectionist mob. We stand here today with our democracy intact because of those officers.”

At the White House, few Republicans were expected for a ceremony at which President Joe Biden will award Presidential Citizens Medals to a dozen state and local officials, election workers and police officers for their “exemplary deeds of service for their country or their fellow citizens” in upholding the results of the 2020 election and fighting back the Capitol mob.

It's all a far cry from Sept. 11, 2001, when lawmakers who had frantically evacuated the Capitol during the terrorist attack gathered there later in the day in a moment of silence and broke out in “God Bless America,” Republicans and Democrats shoulder to shoulder. “They stood shaken and tearful on the steps of the Capitol, their love of nation and all that it symbolizes plain for the world to see,” an Australian newspaper reported in a passage reflected now in the House's official history. Today, the world sees a different picture, one of turmoil in American democracy coming from within the institution that insurrectionists overran two years ago. The nation's legislative branch is again at a standstill — not from violence this time but because of a tortuous struggle among Republicans over who should lead them, and the House itself, as speaker.

To be sure, a resolution to the immediate crisis may be near as the GOP leadership continues negotiations to appease its hard-right flank. Rep. Kevin McCarthy flipped more than a dozen colleagues to support him



Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., accompanied by members of Congress, and family of fallen officers, speaks during a ceremony marking the second year anniversary of the violent insurrection by supporters of then-President Donald Trump, in Washington, Friday, Jan. 6, 2023.

Associated Press

for House speaker Friday, finally showing progress on the fourth day and 12th ballot of the standoff.

Biden, in his afternoon remarks, will tell stories of heroism, whether in the face of a violent Capitol mob or a vehement horde of Donald Trump-inspired agitators who threatened election workers or otherwise sought to overturn the results. He will appeal for unity.

But the Democratic president can't ignore the warning signs that it could happen again.

In the midterms, candidates who denied the outcome of 2020's free and fair election were defeated for many pivotal statewide positions overseeing elections in battleground states, as were a number of election deniers seeking seats in Congress.

Yet many of the lawmakers who brought baseless claims of election fraud or excused the violence on Jan. 6 continue to serve and are newly empowered. Trump's 2024 candidacy has been slow off the starting blocks, but his war chest is full and some would-be rivals for the Republican presidential nomination have channeled his false claims about the 2020 race. As well, several lawmakers who echoed his lies about a stolen election at

the time are central in the effort to derail McCarthy's ascension to speaker — unswayed by Trump's appeals from afar to support him and end the fight.

The protracted struggle leaves the House leaderless, unable to pass bills and powerless to do much more than hold vote after vote for speaker until a majority is reached. Everything from national security briefings to helping their constituents navigate the federal bureaucracy is on pause because the members-elect can't yet take their oath of office. The chaos of the speaker's election “is about destruction of an institution in a different way,” said Democratic Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, one of the lawmakers who fled the rioters two years ago.

Then, the insurrectionists trapped some lawmakers in the House chamber but never breached it. They held up national business for hours that day.

Now some have felt trapped in the same chamber by the repeated, fruitless votes for speaker and House business is held up for this week and perhaps longer.

“The stream of continuity here is extremism, elements of Trumpism, norms don't matter,” says Democratic

Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois. “It's not about governing, it's about pontificating and advocating an extremist point of view.”

Democratic Rep. Annie Kuster of New Hampshire said, “It is a very small minority who want to throw this institution into chaos.”

At least nine people who were at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, died during or after the rioting, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who authorities said suffered medical emergencies.

Two officers, Howard Liebgood of the Capitol Police and Jeffrey Smith of the Metropolitan Police, were at the Capitol that Jan. 6 and died by suicide in the days following the attack. Biden is honoring both Friday with posthumous medals.

A third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner later determined he died of natural causes.

The Metropolitan Police announced months later that two more of their officers who had responded to the insurrection, Kyle DeFreytag and Gunther Hashida, had also died by suicide.

The lawmakers held a 140-second moment of silence in honor of those officers as some of their families said their names and a bell was rung in their honor. “I wish we didn't have to be here,” said Ken Sicknick, brother of Brian Sicknick, after the ceremony.

After the unsatisfying midterm election for Trump allies, the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack wrapped up its work with a recommendation to the Justice Department to prosecute the former president. A special counsel and ultimately Attorney General Merrick Garland will now decide whether to indict him.

While the congressional investigations have ended, the criminal cases are still very much continuing, both for the 950 arrested and charged in the violent attack and for Trump and his associates who remain under investigation. The second seditious conspiracy trial begins this week, for members of the far-right Proud Boys.

In a measured but significant step, Congress in December amended the Electoral Count Act to limit the role of the vice president in counting electoral votes, to make it harder for individual lawmakers to mount objections to properly certified election results and to eliminate “fake electors” like those deployed by Trump allies in a bid to overturn his defeat to Biden.

After all that, Biden, who made it a tentpole of his agenda to prove to the world that democracies can deliver for their citizens, had dared hope that this was “the first time we're really getting through the whole issue relating to Jan. 6. Things are settling out.” But then came the fight for speaker, rare in the annals of Congress.

“And now, for the first time in 100 years, we can't move?” Biden said earlier this week. “It's not a good look. It's not a good thing.” “Look,” he went on, “how do you think it looks to the rest of the world?” □

EPA moves to toughen standards for deadly soot pollution

By **MATTHEW DALY**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is proposing tougher standards for a deadly air pollutant, saying that reducing soot from tailpipes, smokestacks and wildfires could prevent thousands of premature deaths a year.

A proposal released Friday by the Environmental Protection Agency would set maximum levels of 9 to 10 micrograms of fine particle pollution per cubic meter of air, down from 12 micrograms set a decade ago under the Obama administration.

The standard for particle pollution, more commonly known as soot, was left unchanged by then-President Donald Trump, who overrode a scientific recommendation for a lower standard in his final days in office.

Environmental and public health groups that have been pushing for a stronger standard were disappointed, saying the EPA proposal does not go far enough to limit emissions of what is broadly called "fine particulate matter," the tiny bits of soot we breathe in unseen from tailpipes, wildfires, factory and power plant smokestacks and other sources.

In a development that could lead to an even lower standard, the EPA said Friday it also would take comments on a range of ideas submitted by a scientific advisory committee, including a proposal that would lower the maximum standard for soot to 8 micrograms.

A microgram is one-millionth of a gram.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said the proposal to strengthen the national ambient air quality standards for fine particle pollution would help prevent serious health problems, including asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

Those populations include children, older adults and those with heart and lung

conditions as well as low-income and minority com-

While it would strengthen some public health protec-

the Portland Cement Association, which represents

Smog, soot and other pollution near factories, power plants and other hazards has a "devastating impact on public health," she said. The EPA proposal would require states, counties and tribal governments to meet a stricter air quality standard for fine particulate matter up to 2.5 microns in diameter far smaller than the diameter of a human hair.

A micron, also called a micrometer, is equal to one-millionth of a meter.

The standard would not force polluters to shut down, but the EPA and state regulators could use it as the basis for other rules that target pollution from specific sources such as diesel-fueled trucks, refineries and power plants.

A 2022 report by the American Lung Association found that 63 million Americans live in counties that experience unhealthy daily spikes in soot pollution and 21 million live in counties that exceed annual limits for soot pollution. Most of those counties were in 11 Western states, the report said. People of color were 61% more likely than white people to live in a county with unhealthy air quality, the report said.

Fresno, California, displaced Fairbanks, Alaska as the metropolitan area with the worst short-term particle pollution, the report found, while Bakersfield, California, continued in the most-polluted slot for year-round particle pollution for the third year in a row.

As of Dec. 31, five metropolitan areas were not in compliance with current standards, the EPA said. Four of those areas are in California, including the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles.

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, which includes Pittsburgh, also is out of compliance.

The EPA will accept comments on the proposed rule through mid-March and will hold a virtual public hearing over several days.

A final rule is expected this summer. □



Traffic moves along along 99 south in Fresno, Calif., Dec. 28, 2017.

Associated Press

munities throughout the United States.

"This administration is committed to working to ensure that all people, regardless of the color of their skin, the community they live in or the money in their pocket, have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and the opportunity to lead a healthy life," Regan said at a news conference. "At EPA, we are working every single day to create cleaner and healthier communities for all and have been doing so for over 50 years." Harold Wimmer, the president of the American Lung Association, called the EPA's proposal disappointing, saying it is "inadequate to protect public health from this deadly pollutant." "Current science shows that stronger limits are urgently needed ... to protect vulnerable populations," Wimmer said, calling for the EPA to lower the standard to 8 micrograms or lower.

Seth Johnson, an attorney for the environmental group Earthjustice, called the EPA plan "a disappointment and missed opportunity overall."

tions, "EPA is not living up to the ambitions of this administration to follow the science, protect public health and advance environmental justice," Johnson said. He urged the EPA "to hear communities, not industrial polluters, and strengthen this rule."

Overburdened communities have the right to breathe clean air."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups called for the current standards to be maintained.

"The United States has some of the best air quality in the world, thanks to steady reductions in contributors to particulate matter emissions over the last decade," said Chad Whiteman, vice president of environment and regulatory affairs at the chamber's Global Energy Institute.

The proposed rule could "stifle manufacturing and industrial investment and exacerbate permitting challenges that continue to hamper the economy," Whiteman said.

Mike Ireland, president of

U.S. cement manufacturers, added that the EPA's proposed action "is yet another regulatory burden that will hamper the cement industry's ability to manufacture sustainable construction materials to meet the nation's infrastructure needs."

EPA scientists have estimated exposure at current limits causes the early deaths of thousands of Americans annually from heart disease and lung cancer as well as causing other health problems.

Dr. Doris Browne, president of the National Medical Association, the oldest and largest national organization representing African American physicians, hailed the plan as "the bold action needed to protect public health across the country."

Appearing with Regan at a news conference, Browne said the proposal is likely to have lasting benefits across the country "but especially for those communities of color and low-income communities that experience the increase in particulate matter pollution."

Arizona's shipping container wall on border is coming down

By ANITA SNOW

Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Former Republican Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey's border barrier of shipping containers has been largely dismantled in time for a new Democratic administration, costing tens of millions of dollars over just a few months as they were set up and taken down again. Removal of the hulking red, gold and blue steel boxes is creating a stark visual shift in affected sections of Arizona's southern landscape as a new governor takes power and another \$76 million in state funds is spent to remove the containers on top of the \$95 million it cost to put them there.

Ducey had said the containers placed at a openings along the border near the western community of Yuma and across a grasslands valley in eastern Arizona's Cochise County were intended as a temporary measure until the Biden administration undertook permanent construction to secure the border.

Gov. Katie Hobbs, who was sworn in this week, was among Democrats who



Two hydraulic excavators operated by AshBritt Management & Logistics remove shipping containers Tuesday morning, Jan. 3, 2023, that were used to fill a gap in the border fence between the United States and Mexico near Morelos Dam along the South Yuma Levee Road between County 8th Street and County 8 1/2 Street in Yuma, Ariz.

Associated Press

called it a political stunt. Border security was a key issue of Donald Trump's presidency and remains a focus for many Republicans. Hobbs' GOP rival, Kari Lake, campaigned on a promise to dispatch the National Guard to the border on her first day in office.

The issue wound up in federal court after Ducey sued, asking that Arizona be recognized as having the sole or shared jurisdiction for

the strip of federal land the containers were placed on. He also argued Arizona had the right to protect its residents from illegal immigration he termed a humanitarian crisis.

An agreement between Ducey's administration and the federal agencies named in his lawsuit called for the containers to come down by Wednesday, the day before Hobbs's inauguration.

But the court later stayed all deadlines in the case by 30 days to give Hobbs and new Attorney General Kris Mayes time to review the situation.

Workers continue to dismantle the container wall in Cochise County, said Russ McSpadden, who has regularly visited the site in remote San Rafael Valley as a southwest conservation advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity.

About a third of some 3,000 containers were erected there, raising concerns about possible harm to local wildlife and natural water systems before protesters halted the work in early December. Environmentalists said the work in the Coronado National Forest imperiled endangered or threatened species like the western yellow-billed cuckoo and the Mexican spotted owl. Yuma Mayor Doug Nicholls said in an interview this week the U.S. government plans permanent construction beginning as soon as this month to close the biggest gap in the wall in his area, around the Morelos Dam section that immigrants often waded through. But Nicholls said he worries about several other gaps not scheduled to be closed.

"The containers were never going to totally stop people from crossing, but it was a way to better control it," said Nicholls, a Republican who is in regular contact with the White House and U.S. agencies about hundreds of asylum seekers arriving in his small city daily. □

Crime worries underpin celebration as Carnival season begins

By KEVIN MCGILL

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans kicked off its annual Carnival season Friday, a weeklong celebration of joyous street parties, lavish balls and colorful parades complicated this year by concerns over crime and a depleted police force that last year forced a shortening of Mardi Gras parade routes.

City officials marked the pre-Lenten season's start by dancing their way into an event amid brass band music, costumed revelers and giant figurines of jesters and fantasy characters at Mardi Gras World by the Mississippi River. The cavernous venue is where many parade floats are assembled and stored.

Other signs that the city was ready for Mardi Gras:

Restaurants and bars began earnestly hawking king cakes, a sugary seasonal delicacy; a group of masked revelers known as the Phunny Phorty Phelows prepared to herald Carnival with its annual nighttime streetcar ride on the historic St. Charles Avenue tracks; and the Krewe of Jeanne d'Arc, was to march through the French Quarter.

But the celebratory mood was underpinned by worries about continued violent crime that took hold during the pandemic, complicated by a police force that by various estimates has dwindled to about 900 members. That is hundreds fewer than what local experts say is needed.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell addressed the police issue at the morning event,

announcing that the city planned to pay officers from outside police agencies to bolster local law enforcement during the season.

She also held out hope that parade routes might be restored to their traditional lengths a possible boon to restaurants and bars that lost out on revenue last year due to shortened routes and the year before when the COVID-19 pandemic canceled parades altogether.

"If we collectively find the officers needed to support our krewes returning to the streets of New Orleans, there will be no real discussion about which routes are going to be affected or not," Cantrell said.

Carnival officially begins each year on Jan. 6, the 12th day after Christmas,

known as King's Day in New Orleans. It continues until Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. Mardi Gras falls on Feb. 21 this year.

New Orleans' raucous celebration is the nation's best

known, but the holiday is also celebrated throughout much of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. Mobile, Alabama, lays claim to the oldest Mardi Gras celebration in the country. □



Mardi Gras King Cakes by pastry chef Jean-Luc Albin at Maurice French Pastries are displayed on Thursday, Feb. 10, 2011, in Metairie, La.

Associated Press

Kremlin-ordered truce is uncertain amid mutual mistrust

By **ANDREW MELDRUM**

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — An uneasy calm in Kyiv on Friday was broken by air-raid sirens that also blared across the rest of Ukraine as a Russian cease-fire declaration for the Orthodox Christmas took effect. Ukrainian and Western officials have scorned the truce as a ploy. No explosions were heard in the capital. And reports of sporadic fighting elsewhere in Ukraine could not immediately be confirmed. Clashes there could take hours to become public. Kyiv residents ventured out into a light dusting of snow to buy gifts, cakes and groceries for Christmas Eve family celebrations, hours after the cease-fire was to have started.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday ordered his forces in Ukraine to observe a unilateral, 36-hour cease-fire. Kyiv officials dismissed the move but didn't clarify whether Ukrainian troops would follow suit. Moscow also didn't say whether its forces would retaliate if Ukraine kept fighting, but the Moscow-appointed head of the Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin, said they would. The Russian-declared truce in the nearly 11-month war began at noon Friday and was to continue through



A local resident runs past a burning house hit by the Russian shelling in Kherson, Ukraine, on the Orthodox Christmas Eve Friday, Jan. 6, 2023.

midnight Saturday Moscow time (0900 GMT Friday to 2100 GMT Saturday; 4 a.m. EST Friday to 4 p.m. EST Saturday). Air-raid sirens sounded in Kyiv about 40 minutes after the Russian cease-fire was to come into effect. The widely used "Alerts in Ukraine" app, which includes information from emergency services, showed sirens blaring across the country. Russia's Defense Ministry alleged that Ukrainian forces continued to shell its positions, and said its forces returned fire to suppress the attacks.

But it wasn't clear from the statement whether the attacks and return of fire took place before or after the cease-fire took effect. The ministry's spokesman, Igor Konashenkov, reported multiple Ukrainian attacks in the eastern Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions. It was not possible to verify the claims. Putin's announcement Thursday that the Kremlin's troops would stop fighting along the more than 1,000-kilometer (680-mile) front line and elsewhere was unexpected. It came after the head of the Rus-

sian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, proposed a cease-fire for the Christmas holiday. The Orthodox Church, which uses the Julian calendar, celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7. But Ukrainian and Western officials portrayed the announcement as an attempt by Putin to grab the moral high ground, while possibly seeking to snatch the battlefield initiative and rob the Ukrainians of momentum amid their counteroffensive of recent months. "Now they want to use Christmas as a cover to

stop the advance of our guys in the (eastern) Donbas (region) for a while and bring equipment, ammunition and mobilized people closer to our positions," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Thursday. He didn't, however, state outright that Kyiv would ignore Putin's request. In a Christmas Eve message to the nation, Zelenskyy called it "a holiday of harmony and family unity. And together we are all a big Ukrainian family. 'No matter where we are now at home, at work, in a trench, on the road, in Ukraine or abroad our family is united as never before. ... United in its belief in a single victory.'" U.S. President Joe Biden has also expressed wariness about the Russian cease-fire, saying it was "interesting" that Putin was ready to bomb hospitals, nurseries and churches in recent weeks on Christmas and New Year's. "I think (Putin) is trying to find some oxygen," Biden said. U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Washington had "little faith in the intentions behind this announcement," adding that Kremlin officials "have given us no reason to take anything that they offer at face value." □

Chad's government says it foiled 'destabilization' attempt

By **SAM MEDNICK**

Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Chad's government has foiled an attempt to desta-

bilize the country and undermine the constitution, the government spokesman said in a statement. Eleven people conspired in

the plot, including soldiers and a human rights activist, said Aziz Mahamat Saleh on Thursday. They were arrested last month and transferred to the high court in the capital, N'Djamena. "A judicial investigation has been opened against these people for undermining the constitutional order, criminal association, illegal possession of firearms and complicity," said Saleh. The accused were all military except for one human rights activist, Baradine Berdei Targuio, who was charged with breaching national security and the illegal possession of weap-

ons. Tensions have risen in the West African nation in recent months with unprecedented protests mounting against the government. Mahamat Idriss Deby was declared the head of state after his father's death in April 2021, instead of following the Chadian constitution's line of succession. Opposition political parties at the time called the handover a coup d'etat, but later agreed to accept Deby as interim leader for 18 months. In October, Chadian security forces opened fire on anti-government demon-

strators in the country's two largest cities killing at least 60 people. The men's arrest is an attempt to silence dissident voices say analysts. "There are people not happy with the current government and its handling of (the) transition," said Rida Lyammouri, senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, a Moroccan-based think tank. "What's interesting is that those accused of the plot are mixed of military and human right officials, something that is not very common when we talk about an attempted coup," he said. □



Anti-government demonstrators set a barricade on fire during clashes in N'Djamena, Chad, Thursday Oct. 20, 2022.

Associated Press

New Israeli government takes steps to penalize Palestinians

By ISABEL DEBRE

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In some of its first acts since coming to power, Israel's new Security Cabinet approved a series of punitive steps against the Palestinian leadership, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Friday.

According to a statement from Netanyahu's office, the move is in retaliation for Palestinians pushing the U.N.'s highest judicial body to give its opinion on the Israeli occupation.

The development underscores the hard-line approach to the Palestinians that Israel's new ultranationalist government has promised at a time of rising violence in the occupied territories.

It comes a week after the United Nations General Assembly voted to approve a resolution requesting that the International Court of Justice intervene and render an opinion on the legality of Israeli policies in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Israel's Security Cabinet described the Palestinian Authority's request to the U.N. as a "decision to wage political and legal war against the State of Israel."

"The current government



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attends the weekly cabinet meeting, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2023, in Jerusalem.

will not sit idly by in the face of this war and will respond as necessary," it said.

In response, the Security Cabinet, packed with Netanyahu's far-right and religiously conservative allies, decided Israel would withhold \$39 million from the Palestinian Authority and transfer the funds instead to a compensation program for the families of Israeli victims of Palestinian militant attacks.

It also said Israel would further deduct revenue it typi-

cally transfers to the cash-strapped PA a sum equal to the amount the authority paid last year to families of Palestinian prisoners and those killed in the conflict, including militants implicated in attacks against Israelis. The Palestinian leadership describes the payments as necessary social welfare, while Israel says the so-called Martyrs' Fund incentivizes violence. Israel's withheld funds threaten to exacerbate the PA's fiscal woes.

The Security Cabinet also targeted Palestinian officials directly, saying it would deny benefits to "VIPs who are leading the political and legal war against Israel." Top PA officials receive Israeli permits that allow them to travel easily in and out of the occupied West Bank, unlike ordinary Palestinians. Other measures announced Friday focused on the West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967 Mid-east war. Through decades

of failed peace talks, Israel has controlled the territory, which Palestinians have long demanded as part of their hoped-for state.

Israel's new far-right government has vowed to prioritize the expansion of settlements and legalize illegally built outposts. Already, Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements home to around 500,000 Israelis who live alongside around 2.5 million Palestinians.

The Security Cabinet, a small group of high-level ministers who answer directly to the prime minister, also said it would freeze Palestinian construction in Area C, the 60% of the West Bank where, under interim peace accords, Israel already exercises complete control. Area C includes the settlements, as well as rural areas that are home to some 300,000 Palestinians, according to the U.N. The final step detailed by the government Friday involves taking unspecified "action" against organizations in the West Bank that "promote terrorist activity or any hostile activity." That includes groups carrying out "political and legal action against Israel under the guise of humanitarian work," it said. □

Bulgarians celebrate Epiphany with traditional rituals

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) —

Thousands of young men are plunging into rivers and lakes across Bulgaria to retrieve crucifixes, in an old ritual marking the feast of Epiphany.

By tradition, a crucifix is cast into the waters of a lake or river, and it is believed that the person who retrieves it will be freed from evil spirits and will be healthy through the year.

After the cross is fished out, the priest sprinkles believers with water using a bunch of basil.

The celebration of Epiphany, or the Apparition of Christ, as Bulgarians call it, began on Friday in Sofia

with a water blessing ceremony.

Senior clergymen of Bulgaria's Orthodox church said prayers for the prosperity of the people and blessed the colors of representative army units in a tradition that was abandoned in 1946 but re-established following the fall of communism in 1992.

In the small mountain city of Kalofer in central Bulgaria, people stick to a century-old unique ritual, as nearly dozens of men dressed in traditional white embroidered shirts wade into the Tundzha River to perform a slow "mazhko horo," or men's dance.

Led by the town's mayor and inspired by bass drums and bagpipes, the men dance for nearly half an hour, holding each other by the shoulders and stomping on the rocky riverbed up to their waists in the cold water.

Despite the unusual spring-like weather which damped down the thrill of dancing among ice chunks in the river, the men did not skip the usual preparations, which kick off the previous night as they warm up in the city tavern with local red wine.

Epiphany marks the end of the 12 days of Christmas, but not all Orthodox Chris-



Men play bagpipes and drums as they form a procession into the cold Tundzha River to celebrate Epiphany in the town of Kalofer, Friday, Jan. 6, 2023.

Associated Press

tian churches celebrate it on the same day.

While the Orthodox Christian churches in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania celebrate the feast on Jan. 6, Orthodox Churches in Russia, Ukraine and Serbia follow the Julian calendar, according to which Epiph-

any is celebrated on Jan. 19, as their Christmas falls on Jan. 7.

Some Western Christian churches celebrate the religious holiday of Epiphany as Three Kings Day, which marks the visit of the Magi, or three wise men, to the baby Jesus, and closes out

Europe's inflation slows again but cost of living still high

(AP) — Europe ended a bad year for inflation with some relief as price gains eased again. While the cost of living is still painfully high, the slowdown is a sign that the worst might be over for weary consumers.

The consumer price index for the 19 countries that used the euro currency rose 9.2% in December from a year earlier, the slowest pace since August, the European Union statistics agency Eurostat said Friday. Croatia joined the eurozone on Jan. 1.

It was the second straight decline in inflation since June 2021. In November, the rate dipped to 10.1% after peaking at a record 10.6% in the previous month. Households and businesses across Europe have been plagued by surging energy costs since Russia launched its war in Ukraine in February, which played havoc with oil and natural gas markets and have been the main driver of inflation.

The latest numbers indicate that the energy crisis may be easing for now. Energy price rises slowed to 25.7%, down from 34.9% in November and 41.5% in October.

Natural gas prices have slipped from all-time highs this summer as Europe has largely filled its storage for winter with supplies from other countries while warmer-than-usual weather has reduced fears of a shortage during the heating season. Food price gains, the other big factor that's been driving up European inflation, held fairly steady. Prices for food, alcohol and tobacco rose at a 13.8% annual pace in December, a smidgen higher than the month before.

Inflation also has been worsened by bottlenecks in supplies of raw materials and parts amid rebounding global consumer demand after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions ended.

"It is likely that the peak in inflation is behind us now, but far more relevant for the economy and policy-makers is whether inflation will structurally trend back to 2% from here on," said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist at ING Bank.

So-called core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, climbed to 5.2% last month from November's 5%, as prices rose for both ser-

vices and goods such as clothing, appliances, cars and computers. Colijn and other economists said that means European Central Bank officials will likely roll out more interest rate hikes to get inflation back to their 2% target.

Soaring costs for energy and food have threatened a recession and fed labor unrest as wages fail to keep pace with the price rises. Across Europe, subway staff, hospital workers, train drivers, postal workers and air traffic controllers have gone on strike, threatening political turmoil.

In a sign that energy costs remain a worry for political leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday urged energy suppliers to renegotiate what he called "abusive contracts" with small businesses to ensure "reasonable" price hikes.

Macron spoke to bakers gathered at the presidential palace for a traditional Epiphany kings cake ceremony, underscoring how energy and food prices are intertwined.

"Like you, I've had enough of people making excessive profits on the crisis," he



A woman walks with purchases past a store in Berlin, Germany, Friday, April 1, 2022. Europe ended a bad year for inflation with some relief as price gains eased again, though they still rose a painful 9.2% in December, according to data released Friday, Jan. 6, 2023.

(AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin, File)

said. The French government has capped natural gas and electricity price hikes to 15% this year for consumers and some very small companies that don't use much energy. But more energy-intensive businesses, like bakeries, aren't covered, leaving some of them facing closure because they can't pay their bills. While governments have offered relief on high energy bills, central banks are battling inflation by hiking interest rates.

Last month, the European Central Bank raised its

benchmark rate by half a point, slowing its record pace of interest rate increases slightly but promising that more hikes are on the way. It matched actions taken by counterparts in the U.S., United Kingdom and elsewhere.

"The eurozone economy is at best stagnating, and persistently strong core inflation means the ECB will feel duty bound to press on with its tightening cycle for a while yet," said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics. □



In this photo provided by the Department of Interior and Local Government Photo, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. speaks during a news conference in Quezon City, Philippines Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023. The Philippines' interior secretary announced Wednesday he has asked all police generals and full colonels to submit their courtesy resignation to clean the ranks of ties to illegal drugs. (Department of Interior and Local Government Photo via AP)

Philippines seeks to cleanse police force of drug ties

(AP) — The Philippines' interior secretary announced Wednesday he has asked all police generals and full colonels to submit their courtesy resignation to clean the ranks of ties to illegal drugs.

Around 300 officers are covered by the directive, which was recommended by the national police chief, who will also submit his courtesy resignation, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. said in a news conference.

"It appears that there is a big problem in our police force. It appears there are generals and colonels involved in drugs," he said. "We need to clean our ranks. We need the trust of the people."

More than a dozen police officers were arrested or relieved from their posts and put under investigation last year for their involvement or suspected involvement in the drug trade. Abalos cited a recent case of law enforcers selling drugs in their office.

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency was also subject to raids, arrests and dismissals in recent months.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte has earned international condemnation for his lethal war on drugs, which — according to police data — left over 6,200 suspects dead. Human rights groups have cited higher death tolls and accused some police officers

of fabricating evidence to make it appear that victims violently resisted arrest.

In November, Philippine National Police Chief Rodolfo Azurin Jr. said he directed law enforcers to minimize killings of people engaged in drug activities. Abalos said it's difficult to fight a war against illegal drugs if supposed allies could shoot your back, and the resignations aim to prevent erring officers from covering their tracks or filing trumped-up charges.

A committee will be formed to review the records of police officials to determine if they are involved in the illegal drug trade, he said, adding that those who are not involved have nothing to worry about. □

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How it all began

It was 1938 when Mr. Eric Ponson started his journey at General Store. Ponson did not hesitate and decided to buy General Store. Buying a store and thus going from employee to owner of a business with a debt of 11.000 guilders was not an easy task.

As the saying goes: "Behind every successful man, is a strong woman". In the case of Ponson, this was no different. As General Store progressed and slowly became successful, Mrs. Irene Ponson, came in to assist her husband. Irene Ponson is a visionary, she knew exactly where and how to invest and within a short amount of time in 1970, General Store moved to a better location at the Steenweg. This allowed for a lot more merchandise, products and employees. Supply and demand was as such, that General Store became the number 1 electrical business.

Business kept going so well that the location at the Steenweg became too small and was moved later to Dakota Shopping Paradise and later to Pedro Gallegostraat. With this move, an expansion was decided upon

and an electronics store in Savaneta was opened. General Store still being very successful was ready for more growth.

Ricky, Kenneth, Corine and Frans are the fruits of this marriage. Kenneth and Frans however, decided to further develop their father's legacy and continued with their mother's dream to expand the business. An expansion not in square feet only, but in merchandise as well. A great opportunity presented itself when the Ponson family was able to buy a piece of property across from the airport. In 2007 the Ponson family moved into their brand new and huge building

After a successful opening and expansion, Kenneth and Frans who inherited their mother's vision, decided that General Store was ready for yet another expansion. With the support of Mr. Tom Barfell and management of Do it Best in the States, the construction of Do it Center commenced.

Fast forward to today. A Do it Center in Aruba, with more than 50.000 top of the line items for interior as well exterior use, building materials, STO products and a top of the line grocery store. Perseverance, responsibility, vision and the courage to invest have made Ponson's General Store as successful as it is today.

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Located in Shaba, Noord. This is the last sibling of the Do It Center family. Here you will

be able to find anything you are looking for. The building is divided into several departments from home to hardware to groceries. Everything under one roof.

Groceries? Visit the fully stocked supermarket with fresh fruits and vegetables and high class meat selections. Highly known products and brands are here for you to grab. Every week Do It Center Groceries offers its weekly special on selected items. Weekly specials are very popular and a perfect chance for you to buy your favorite products at a reduced price.

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Aruba to me



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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Bob "Smitty" Smith from Myers, FL.

They wrote to us saying; "Aruba is my home away from home. We have been coming over 40 years and received a nice plaque and meeting in Parliament with Mr Dangui Oduber in 2021. We have 6 weeks time-share and come 3 times a year. We have many Dear Friends who live here including Robert and Gladiola Kock, and Ozzie and Tracy Lussier who own here and Mass. We are always bringing new groups here, and everyone always wants to come back."

In the photos from left to right;
Smiths -43 years-Mass & FL.
Shannons- 6 years Boston
Lussiers- 15 years - Aruba & Mass
Chamberlins - 7 years - Boston
Pollards - 1 year -Kentucky - FL.
Gorry's - 1 year - FL.

Thank you for sharing with us and our readers the meaning that Aruba has to you and for introducing Aruba to new visitors! □

AHATA launches the second series of its awareness campaign "I am Tourism"

ORANJESTAD - Starting January 6, 2023, the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association AHATA is launching the second series of their I am Tourism campaign

The goal is to raise awareness among the community of the multiple opportunities available within the tourism sector. It also shows the pride and passion of those working in this industry.

On January 4, 2023, the Minister of Tourism Dangui Oduber met with AHATA CEO Tisa La Sorte to discuss the second awareness campaign series.

They looked back at tourism in 2022 and discussed the projects in 2023, including the biggest challenge for 2023.



Series 2 consists of 9 awareness videos of young professionals working in hospitality, where they describe the importance of their job. AHATA considers these persons as ambassadors of our tourism industry, the pillar of our economy. These

videos show the diversity of the jobs and individuals in the sector and how the passion and dedication of each employee represent Aruba's tourism product which is well-established worldwide. The community can be very proud of the thousands of people that cater to our visitors. That is why they choose the name "I am Tourism".

On Friday, January 6, 2023, they will introduce the ambassadors daily on AHATA's social media platforms. With this campaign, the AHATA hopes to educate the community more about the tourism industry and hopefully inspire more people to pursue a career in the tourism sector, which the Government fully supports.

The Minister thanks Mrs. La Sorte for the encounter and invites the community to watch these videos. □



Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas



SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics

had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history

if you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community Museum and the Carnival Euphoria, all within walking distance from one another.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn



about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barber-shop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

Carnival Euphoria is showcasing Aruba's Carnival. See how are Carnival has developed over the past 65 years.

The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub

— varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down buildings with colorful art pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you name it. Arts & crafts by Cosecha store & Creative Center, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and locally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □



Almost six thousand people ready to light the torch for the 69th edition of Aruba's Carnival

ORANJESTAD – Today, 7th of January the official opening to the Carnival season in Aruba will take place with the torch parade. After two years during which Aruba did not celebrate carnival because of the pandemic of Covid-19, carnival is back, and among the people, the enthusiasm is greater than ever.

A total of six groups, with a total participation of almost six thousand people, will be on the road covered in light, carrying torches and dancing to carnival tonight.

Empire Carnival Group, TOB Carnival Group, Infinity Carnival Group, Royal Carnival Group, Los Laga Bai Carnival Group and Champagne Carnival Group. Since before the New Year, some groups had already announced that tickets to the long-awaited parade were sold out, and with only one day remaining before the great evening, most carnival groups who are taking part in the torch parade were completely sold out.

On social media people were still looking for tickets to take part in the parade, and were willing to pay more than Afl. 200 for a spot, as long as they can jump up to the rhythm of the carnival music in the festive ambience tonight. Expectations are very high, and it is expected that more than ten thousand people will be on the streets tonight during the parade, either in the parade or watching by the side and enjoying the vibes.

The Torch Parade is an easy going parade where the costumes are mostly decorated T-shirts in certain colors. But.... This is just a warming up for the most colorful, creative, inspiring parades that are to come.

The island is known for its white-sanded beaches and perfect climate, but there is one time in the year

that Aruba draws thousands of visitors: carnival. If you have never been here before, come in carnival season as your experience will be amazing. Sensational musical events, queen elections and different parades are all part of this spectacular phenomenon. Carnival is part of Aruba's history and cultural heritage, actually it is the largest cultural festival on the island. For the islanders it is a way to express their creativity and break away from the daily buzz of life. Dancing to the rhythm of local music while enjoying the ambience of the public are some of the ingredients of this festival. Oranjestad and San Nicolas are the stages for this display of unique designed costumes, amazing ambience and upbeat, local music. The festival is for everybody accessible and safe to visit. Behind the screens there is an enormous organization that makes sure that this festival runs smoothly. The police, inspection department, Red Cross volunteers, garbage service and many others work day and night to make sure that carnival is a success. All the trailers are being carefully inspected before they are allowed to participate as well as the vehicles that pull them. After each parade the streets are being cleaned and road blocks are being taken away so next day normal traffic flow occurs. The several organizations and institutions work together with the official carnival organization SMAC.

History

In the 1920's the first carnival events were organized by social clubs that started private costume and masquerade parties. This year we celebrate Aruba's 66th carnival, which means that the first grand parade took place in 1955. Since then Aruba's carnival has grown big and is now able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the most renowned Carnival celebrations around the world. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 39 Ledger
 - 1 Southern item dish
 - 6 Hardly wordy
 - 11 Bolshevik leader
 - 12 Succulent plants
 - 13 Tennis star Naomi
 - 14 Schemes
 - 15 List of lines
 - 17 Game cube
 - 18 Total
 - 19 Studio time
 - 22 Agreeable answer
 - 23 Horse restraint
 - 24 HMO fee
 - 25 Can feature
 - 27 Isr. neighbor
 - 30 Meals
 - 31 Heady brew
 - 32 Shelley work
 - 33 Brings dishonor upon
 - 35 Seminar group
 - 38 Uniform color

DOWN

- 1 Not matte
- 2 Save
- 3 Up — (indignant)
- 4 Poly-nesian idol
- 5 Pics
- 6 Keg need
- 7 Angled pipe
- 8 Band aide
- 9 Grad-to-be
- 10 German steel city
- 16 Service pieces
- 20 Hockey plays
- 21 Pig's place
- 24 Busy one in Apr.
- 25 Intellect-ual
- 26 Interested in trying
- 27 Thin layer
- 28 Late hour
- 29 Plagues
- 30 Boxing ring
- 34 Guinness of film
- 36 Misstep
- 37 Caustic stuff

H	A	D	E	S	R	I	S	E	S
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B	I	N	G	E	E	A	G	E	R
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Yesterday's answer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1					12				
3					14				
5				15			17		
8				19	20	21			
22				23					
			24						
	25	25					27	28	29
30							31		
32				33	34				
35			36	37	38				
39					40				
41					42				

1-7

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-7 CRYPTOQUOTE
M COJ VPE ZPT C HMNFEDT

ISTXDVL ISE ZPT ITPCXDT

OPPSHXDTOL — GDAMOF

QTPWDTI
Yesterday's Cryptquote: TODAY I SHALL BEHAVE AS IF THIS IS THE DAY I WILL BE REMEMBERED. — DR. SEUSS



Grain is offloaded from the Eaubonne bulk carrier ship after it docked in the port of Mombasa, Kenya on Nov. 26, 2022.

Associated Press

Global food prices in 2022 hit record high amid drought, war

ROME (AP) — Global prices for food commodities like grain and vegetable oils were the highest on record last year even after falling for nine months in a row, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said, as Russia's war in Ukraine, drought and other factors drove up inflation and worsened hunger worldwide.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of commonly traded food commodities, dipped by 1.9% in December from a month earlier, the Rome-based organization said Friday. For the whole year, it averaged 143.7 points, more than 14% above the 2021 average, which also saw large increases.

The December decline was led by a drop in the price of vegetable oils amid shrinking import demand, expectations of increased soy oil production

in South America and lower crude oil prices. Grain and meat were also down, while dairy and sugar rose slightly.

"Calmer food commodity prices are welcome after two very volatile years," FAO chief economist Maximo Torero said in a prepared statement. "It is important to remain vigilant and keep a strong focus on mitigating global food insecurity given that world food prices remain at elevated levels, with many staples near record highs, and with prices of rice increasing, and still many risks associated with future supplies."

Last year, the U.N. organization's Food Price Index hit the highest level since its records began in 1961, according to FAO data.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February exacerbated a food crisis because the two countries were leading global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and

other products, especially to nations in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia that were already struggling with hunger.

With critical Black Sea supplies disrupted, food prices rose to record highs, increasing inflation, poverty and food insecurity in developing nations that rely on imports.

The war also jolted energy markets and fertilizer supplies, both key to food production. That was on top of climate shocks that have fueled starvation in places like the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya are badly affected by the worst drought in decades, with the U.N. warning that parts of Somalia are facing famine. Thousands of people have already died. Prices for wheat and corn reached a record high last year, though they fell in December along with the costs of other grains, the FAO said. It said harvests in the Southern Hemisphere boosted supplies and there was strong competition among exporters. The organization's Vegetable Oil Price Index hit an all-time high last year, even as it tumbled in December to its lowest level since February 2021. For all of 2022, the FAO Dairy Price Index and Meat Price Index also were the highest since 1990. □

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24/7

Twitter leak exposes 235 million email addresses from hack

By **BARBARA ORTUTAY**
AP Technology Writer

Personal emails linked to 235 million Twitter accounts hacked some time ago have been exposed according to Israeli security researcher Alon Gal making millions vulnerable to having their accounts compromised or identities exposed if they have used the site anonymously to criticize oppressive governments, for instance.

Gal, who is the co-founder and chief technology officer at cybersecurity firm Hudson Rock, wrote in a LinkedIn post this week that the leak "will unfortunately lead to a lot of hacking, targeted phishing, and doxing."

While account passwords were not leaked, malicious hackers could use the email addresses to try to reset people's passwords, or guess them if they are commonly used or reused with other accounts. That's especially a risk if the accounts are not protected by two-factor authentication, which adds a second layer of security to password-protected accounts by having users enter an auto-generated code to log in.

People who use Twitter anonymously should have a Twitter-dedicated email address that does not disclose who they are and is used solely for Twitter, experts say.

Though the hack appears to have taken place before Elon Musk took over Twitter, the news of the leaked emails adds another headache for the billionaire, whose first couple months as head of Twitter have been chaotic, to say the least.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a message for comment on the hack.

News of the breach could put the company in trouble with the Federal Trade Commission. The San Francisco company signed a consent agreement with the agency in 2011 that required it to address serious



The Twitter logo is seen on the awning of the building that houses the Twitter office in New York, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2022.

Associated Press

data-security lapses.

Twitter paid a \$150 million penalty last May, several months before Musk's takeover, for violating the consent order. An updated version established new procedures requiring the company to implement an enhanced privacy-protection program as well as beefing up information se-

curity.

In November, a group of Democratic lawmakers asked federal regulators to investigate any possible violations by the platform of consumer-protection laws or of its data-security commitments.

The FTC said at the time it is "tracking recent developments at Twitter with deep

concern," though no formal investigation has been announced.

But experts and current and former Twitter employees have been warning of serious security risks flowing from the drastically reduced staff and deepening disorder within the company.

In August, Twitter's former head of security filed a whistleblower complaint alleging that the company misled regulators about its poor cybersecurity defenses and its negligence in attempting to root out fake accounts that spread disinformation.

Among Peiter Zatko's most serious accusations is that Twitter violated the terms of the 2011 FTC settlement by falsely claiming that it had put stronger measures in place to protect the security and privacy of its users. □



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Sophia Smith named U.S. Soccer Female Player of the Year

By ANNE M. PETERSON
AP Sports Writer

Forward Sophia Smith was named the U.S. Soccer Female Player of the Year on Friday after leading the national team with 11 goals and starting in a team-high 17 matches.

The 22-year-old Smith is the youngest player to win the award since Mia Hamm won it, also at 22, in 1994. Smith is also the youngest player to lead the United States in scoring since Hamm had 10 goals in 1993. "Obviously this is surreal, and I'm super humbled," Smith said in a statement. "It's been a very exiting year, and certainly there's been some challenges, but just being able to grow and develop in the environments with the National Team and the Thorns, and being surround by such amazing players, players that I have looked up to for so long, has pushed me to become a better player and person."

Smith, who plays for the Portland Thorns, was also named the National Women's Soccer League Most Valuable Player after scoring 14 goals in 18 regular-season matches. She also scored for the Thorns in the league's title game.

"This was a big year for



Portland Thorns FC forward Sophia Smith holds the MVP trophy after the NWSL championship soccer match against the Kansas City Current, Saturday, Oct. 29, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

Sophia, and she deserves this recognition, but I'm just excited about where she can take her game from here," national team coach Vlatko Andonovski said. "She is a special player with special qualities, but the best thing is that she has the humbleness, work ethic and drive to keep developing all aspects of her game."

Smith is currently nursing a foot injury that kept her off the national team's roster for its January training camp in New Zealand.

The United States will play New Zealand on Jan. 18 in Wellington and on Jan. 21 in Auckland. The matches will help both teams ramp up for this summer's World Cup, which will be hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

Smith is one of the players who have emerged as Andonovski has focused on developing young talent in preparation for the World Cup.

Andonovski said in a conference call with reporters on Thursday that Smith's in-

jury is not serious.

"We felt that this was the time that we wanted to fix this and not have any problems going forward," he said. "In fact, she's back to training or light training now. Because of the treatment that she received in December, she wasn't able to train and get up to speed or necessary fitness in order to be in the January camp."

Smith is just the fourth player in history to win both player of the year and young player of the year honors,

joining Lindsey Horan, Julie Ertz and Tobin Heath.

Smith finished second on the team with 1,192 minutes played last year. She became the youngest player since 2000 to score a hat trick when she had her first career three-goal match against Uzbekistan on April 9.

The awards are decided through votes cast by national team coaches and players, member of the U.S. Soccer board of directors, the federation's athletes' council, NWSL coaches, select media members, college coaches and fans.

Smith won with 50.8% of the vote, ahead of Alex Morgan with 18.4%.

Jaedyn Shaw, 18, a midfielder and forward who was a standout at the under-20 Women's World Cup, was named U.S. Soccer Young Female Player of the Year.

Shaw, who plays for the San Diego Wave, won with 35.1% of the vote, followed by forward Alyssa Thompson with 34.4%.

"It means everything to me to be a part of the list of players who have won this award, but it also tells me I have so much work to do to keep improving and growing," Shaw said in a statement. □

Gervonta Davis returns to ring vs. Hector Luis Garcia in D.C.

By STEPHEN WHYNO
AP Sports Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gervonta Davis is not waiting nearly a year between fights, even with a big showdown already on his calendar for April.

Davis is returning to the ring Saturday to face fellow unbeaten boxer Hector Luis Garcia and defend his WBA lightweight title. It's a tune-up of sorts for Davis' upcoming bout against Ryan Garcia, but the "other" Garcia looks to be a substantial challenge for the Baltimore native in his return to the ring in his second hometown.

"This ain't no tune-up right here," Davis' trainer Calvin Ford said. "This is a fight. This

is what we're made for."

Davis beat Rolando Romero by TKO in the sixth round May 28 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn to improve to

27-0. He said he took this fight before facing Ryan Garcia in a few months because Hector Luis Garcia "earned his spot" from a



Gervonta Davis poses for photographs after a WBA lightweight championship boxing bout against Rolando Romero early Sunday, May 29, 2022, in New York.

Associated Press

strong 2022. "The real Garcia is right here," Hector Luis Garcia said at the final prefight news conference Thursday. "I'm the real Garcia. I don't care who he's focused on because I know I'm the true challenge."

Going into Showtime's first boxing event at what's now called Capital One Arena since Mike Tyson's final fight, against Kevin McBride, in 2005, Davis insists he's focused only on what's in front of him, not what's scheduled down the road.

"I can't get to Ryan until I get past Hector, and I want to show that I'm one of the elite guys by the performance I put on Hector," Davis said. "We definitely

aren't looking past this guy." Ford acknowledged it was a "rocky camp" leading up to this fight. Davis was arrested on a domestic violence charge Dec. 27. Davis denied the allegation and said, "I just wanted to clear my name." The woman who called police put out a statement on social media saying Davis "did not harm me or our daughter." He said he was not worried about the fight being called off.

"I feel as though if I keep pushing, that's just a hump in my road," Davis said. "Just like this fight: I've got to get through this fight to go to the next one. It's just humps in the road that we all have in life." □

Family ties have long run strong in the ranks of NFL coaches

By TERESA M. WALKER, DAVE CAMPBELL and JOSH DUBOW

AP Pro Football Writers

Luke Steckel is finishing his 10th season with the Tennessee Titans, the very same NFL team that made its lone Super Bowl appearance with his father, Les, as offensive coordinator.

That connection didn't get Luke Steckel into the family business.

That credit goes to a friend from college and an interview that took Steckel away from being a production assistant on "Iron Man 2" to his other passion: football.

Les Steckel, who worked for seven different NFL teams and coaches, had nothing to do with his son getting his first football job in Cleveland. His son called his father to tell him about the interview.

"It's funny how that stuff works out, but growing up in that environment where it's ... kind of hard to escape it," Steckel said. "This is a fun business. There's some highs and lows, but it's hard to match it with anything else."

The potential downside of football as a family business, naturally, lurks in the issue of nepotism.

Fathers hiring sons or recommending them to friends on other teams can unwittingly perpetuate the sport's long struggle with consistently placing coaches of color in the top roles.

The NFL's annual diversity and inclusion report on occupational mobility patterns acknowledged the issue as recently as the 2020 edition, which cited internal league research that found a total of 63 coaches in the NFL were related either biologically or through marriage. Fifty-three were white. NFL executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent called out the issue in his introductory message published in the 2020 and 2021 reports: "Merit-based policies and practices need to be considered in order to discourage the system of nepotism



New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, right, talks to his son Steve Belichick on the field, before the NFL Super Bowl 52 football game against the Philadelphia Eagles, Sunday, Feb. 4, 2018, in Minneapolis.

Associated Press

that unduly influences the hiring cycle family, agents, friend networks."

In the 2022 edition, there's no mention of family coaching connection statistics or acknowledgment of the nepotism issue.

Of the 35 men who served as a head coach during the 2022 season there have been three firings and subsequent interim replacements 12 are related to current or former NFL coaches. Research by USA Today found at least 93 of 717 on-field coaches this season (about 13%) are related to a current or former NFL coach, and 76 of those 93 family-connected coaches are white.

"The pipeline to become a head coach in the NFL is already blocked or clogged among coaches of color, and then when you add these networks and the father-son relationships that are factored in, the ability to lead an NFL team among black coaches becomes even more out of reach," said Marissa Kiss, a researcher for the Institute for Immigration Research at George Mason University which has conducted several studies of minority hiring in sports.

Those connections can last generations. Sean McVay grandson of former Giants coach and 49ers GM John McVay got his first NFL job on Jon Gruden's staff in Tampa Bay in 2008, about four decades after Gruden's father, Jim, was hired on John McVay's staff at Dayton.

John McVay also helped Jon Gruden get his first NFL job with the 49ers in 1990, and Gruden said before facing Sean McVay as a head coach for the first time in 2018: "It was my time to help a McVay and I wanted to give Sean an opportunity to be a coach." McVay got his first offensive coordinator job in Washington under Jay Gruden, after spending four years as an assistant there under Mike Shanahan who also worked for his father in San Francisco.

Mike's son, Kyle, also joined the family business, getting his first NFL job on Gruden's staff in Tampa in 2004. Kyle Shanahan then worked under his father's former player and assistant, Gary Kubiak in Houston, then as offensive coordinator under his father in Washington and now is finishing his sixth season as head coach in

San Francisco.

Shanahan credits the time he spent as a kid following his father around for helping him learn the business.

"You don't realize how much that stuff helps you until you kind of get into work and you realize the advantages you have and some of the stuff like, 'I guess maybe I was learning as I was growing up and paying attention to a lot of stuff,'" Shanahan said. "I don't think that's just totally unusual with me and my dad and father and sons in football. I think that's, if you go by percentages, I think a lot of kids follow their parents into work, especially if they have a good relationship with them."

Seattle coach Pete Carroll's son, Nate, has been with the Seahawks since he was hired in 2010 and currently serves as an offensive assistant. New England coach Bill Belichick's sons, Steve and Brian, have been Patriots assistants for 11 and seven years, respectively. Kansas City coach Andy Reid's son, Britt, was a Chiefs assistant before he was involved in a drunk driving crash that seriously injured a 5-year-old girl.

Previous Minnesota coach

Mike Zimmer had his son as an assistant and promoted him to co-defensive coordinator. Gary Kubiak retired as Vikings offensive coordinator after the 2020 season, and his son took over for 2021. When Zimmer was fired a year ago, the staff was overhauled. New coach Kevin O'Connell brought in offensive coordinator Wes Phillips, whose father and grandfather were both NFL head coaches. Defensive coordinator Ed Donatell's son is also a Vikings assistant.

Carroll, Belichick, Reid, Zimmer, Kubiak, Phillips and Donatell are all white. The research Kiss and her colleagues conducted at George Mason turned up only two Black head coaches who have ever had sons on staff: Marvin Lewis and Lovie Smith.

New York Jets offensive coordinator Mike LaFleur is the younger brother of Green Bay coach Matt LaFleur, who worked with now-Jets coach Robert Saleh as graduate assistants at Central Michigan in 2004. Saleh got to know Mike during lunch breaks at the LaFleur home near the campus.

"They were trying to save every cent they could because they were GAs and they knew that my parents were right down the street," Mike LaFleur said. "So they're going to come eat our food and watch all the TV that I was trying to watch and use our pool." With his Princeton degree, Steckel easily could have gone to Wall Street. His father encouraged him to chase his passion. Steckel did that, first working in movies and then football. He worked for Mangini, then Pat Shurmur over four seasons.

Then-Titans coach Mike Munchak, who coached the offensive line during Les Steckel's six seasons, hired Luke as his assistant in 2013. Luke stayed on staff with Ken Whisenhunt, his successor Mike Mularkey and also now coach Mike Vrabel. He promoted Luke to tight ends coach in 2021. □

Weekly SPECIALS

<div><div><div>WAS \$17.90</div><div></div><div>Striploin Brasil</div></div><div><div>\$14.85</div><div>Per KG</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$13.28</div><div></div><div>Flanksteak Brasil</div></div><div><div>\$10.28</div><div>Per KG</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$5.77</div><div></div><div>Pepper Stoplight Rainbow Mix</div></div><div><div>\$4.57</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$1.73</div><div></div><div>Papaya</div></div><div><div>\$1.42</div><div>Per KG</div></div></div>	
<div><div><div>WAS \$12.70</div><div></div><div>Marucha/Top Blade Brasil</div></div><div><div>\$9.71</div><div>Per KG</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$2.88</div><div></div><div>Melon Cantaloupe</div></div><div><div>\$2.74</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$1.31</div><div></div><div>EE Black Beans Can 15oz</div></div><div><div>\$1.50</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$4.90</div><div></div><div>EE 100 Orange Juice 64oz</div></div><div><div>\$4.39</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$4.03</div><div></div><div>EE American Singles 16ct</div></div><div><div>\$4.03</div><div>Each</div></div></div>
<div><div><div>WAS \$6.69</div><div></div><div>Post Honey Bunches Oats Honey Roast 14.5oz</div></div><div><div>\$5.71</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$6.35</div><div></div><div>EE 100 Pineapple Juice 64oz</div></div><div><div>\$5.54</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$4.15</div><div></div><div>Kraft BBQ Sauce Sweet Honey 28oz</div></div><div><div>\$3.59</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$9.07</div><div></div><div>Nabisco GF Double Stuffed Oreo 14.03oz</div></div><div><div>\$6.85</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$2.71</div><div></div><div>Doritos Assorted 170gr</div></div><div><div>\$2.28</div><div>Each</div></div></div>
<div><div><div>WAS \$7.31</div><div></div><div>Koning Yoghurt Griekse Stijl 1L</div></div><div><div>\$6.28</div><div>Each</div></div></div> <div><div><div>WAS \$13.85</div><div></div><div>Digiorno 3 Meat/Pepperoni Pizza 27.5oz</div></div><div><div>\$11.42</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$4.03</div><div></div><div>Dove Zeep Men-Care Clean Comfort 4x100gr</div></div><div><div>\$3.71</div><div>Each</div></div></div> <div><div><div>WAS \$31.18</div><div></div><div>Westinghouse Mens 13Pc Clipper & Trimmer Combo</div></div><div><div>\$22.85</div><div>Each</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>WAS \$1.42</div><div></div><div>Premium Deli Ham Low Sodium</div></div><div><div>\$1.14</div><div>100 GR</div></div></div> <div><div><div>WAS \$1.67</div><div></div><div>Dushi Criollo Queso Paisa</div></div><div><div>\$1.48</div><div>100 GR</div></div></div>		

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